

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

**IDENTITY THEFT SCAM** There appears to be an identity theft scam going on in Mississippi, Alabama and possibly Pensacola, Florida. Individuals are calling VA beneficiaries and advising them that their VA files have been destroyed as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The caller advises that VA is trying to rebuild their files and requests their Social Security Numbers and other personal information. The VA Office of Inspector General has agents looking into this with local police agencies. Person wanting to report fraud, waste, or abuse of VA programs should call the VA Office of Inspector General at 1-800-488-8244.

**NO ACROSS-THE-BOARD REVIEW OF PTSD CASES – VA SECRETARY NICHOLSON** (VA News Release November 10, 2005) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will not review the files of 72,000 veterans currently receiving disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder, the Department's Secretary announced today.

On May 19, 2005, VA's Inspector General (IG) reported on an examination of the files of a sample of 2,100 randomly selected veterans with disability ratings for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The IG cited insufficient documentation in the files and a dramatic increase in veterans filing for disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder since 1999.

VA Secretary Nicholson said "We have now just completed our own careful review of those 2,100 files cited in the IG's report. The problems with these files appear to be administrative in nature, such as missing documents, and not fraud. In the absence of evidence of fraud, we're not going to put our veterans through the anxiety of a widespread review of their disability claims. Instead, we're going to improve our training for VA personnel who handle disability claims and toughen administrative oversight."

"Not all combat wounds are caused by bullets and shrapnel," Secretary Nicholson added. "We have a commitment to ensure veterans with PTSD receive compassionate, world-class health care and appropriate disability compensation determinations."

**VETERANS' NEW HEALTH CARE ID CARDS HELP BATTLE IDENTIFY THEFT** (VA News Release November 4, 2004) WASHINGTON – With identity theft as the major fraud reported by Americans in 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has designed a new identity card for veterans that will safeguard confidential information. The card, formally known as the Veterans Identification Card (VIC), will have veterans' photos on the front and identify them as enrollees in the VA's health care system. The card includes the words "service connected" under the photo if the veteran has a service-connected disability.

Identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in the nation. The Federal Trade Commission listed identity theft as the number one fraud reported by consumers in 2003. Requests from veterans and their congressional representatives were instrumental in bringing about these latest changes.

**Veterans should request the new card at their local VA medical facility.** Processing will take five to seven days once eligibility is verified. VA hopes to complete the conversion to the new, safer card by mid-November. The existing cards will remain valid until veterans receive their new cards.

**INCORRECT MONTGOMERY GI BILL - SELECTED RESERVES (CHAPTER 1606) RATES** Chapter 1606 education assistance rates paid for three quarter and half time training during the months of November and December, for training taken in October and November, are incorrect due to an error made in calculations. The payments issued in January for the month of December will reflect the correct rates. No adjustments will be made for erroneous rates due to the calculation error for payments in November and December. A Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) notification letter will be distributed to all Chapter 1606 recipients, which will inform them of the changes.

**VA PRESCRIPTION CO-PAYS TO INCREASE BY \$1.00** (VA News Release November 16, 2005) WASHINGTON – Co-payments for outpatient medicines prescribed through Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

medical facilities will rise by \$1, according to an announcement by VA. The \$1 increase for a 30-day supply of prescription drugs will take effect on January 1, 2006, the first change in VA prescription drug co-payments in four years. The increase to \$8 from \$7 for a 30-day supply of prescription drugs is required by federal law, which bases VA's co-payments for outpatient prescriptions on increases in the Medical Consumer Price Index.

The \$1 increase will not affect veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a 50 percent or greater disability. Also known as "Priority Group 1" veterans, these patients will see no change in their current prescription drug benefit. Other veterans with less pronounced service-connected ailments – those classified as Priority Groups 2 through 6 – will see their prescription drug co-pays rise by \$1, but their annual out-of-pocket expenses for VA medicine will remain capped. The new cap will rise to \$960 per year, up \$120 from the previous level. This means veterans in Priority Groups 2 through 6 will pay no more than \$960 annually for VA outpatient medicine. Veterans who have no injury or illness related in any way to their prior military service – referred to as Priority Groups 7 and 8 – will also see their co-payments increase, but there is no cap on annual payments for outpatient medicine.

Not all prescription drugs will be subject to the \$1 increase. Outpatient medications not subject to co-payments include: medication for treatment of a service-connected disability; medication for a veteran who has a service-connected disability of 50 percent or more; medication for a veteran disabled by 50 percent or more for unemployability; medication for a veteran whose annual income does not exceed the amount of VA pensions; and medications for health problems that may be linked to Agent Orange for Vietnam veterans, to radiation exposure, to undiagnosed illnesses of Persian War veterans, or for new veterans within two years of discharge after serving in a combat theater.

**VA's ONLINE RX REFILL SERVICE THE RIGHT PRESCRIPTION FOR VETERANS** (VA News Release November 23, 2005) WASHINGTON – Tens of thousands of veterans are now receiving their prescription drug refills from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with greater convenience, speed and security, thanks to a new service available to veterans over the Internet. By last month, more than 100,000 veterans had signed up to use MyHealthVet, which is located on VA's Web site at [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov).

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN DECEMBER**

**December 1** payments for November due

**December 5** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 12-30-2005 payments

**December 20** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation or pension awards in time for the 12-30-2005 payments

**December 26** Federal holiday - Christmas

**December 30** payments for December due

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 **1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)**

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications **1-877-823-2378**

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

**Foreign Medical Program Office** (medical treatment abroad) -  
PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

#### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 **1-888-244-6711**

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

#### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

VA Web Site: **[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)**

VA Forms: **[www.va.gov/vaforms](http://www.va.gov/vaforms)**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) **[www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)**

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): **[www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)**

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **[www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)**

St. Pete Regional Office: **[www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)**